

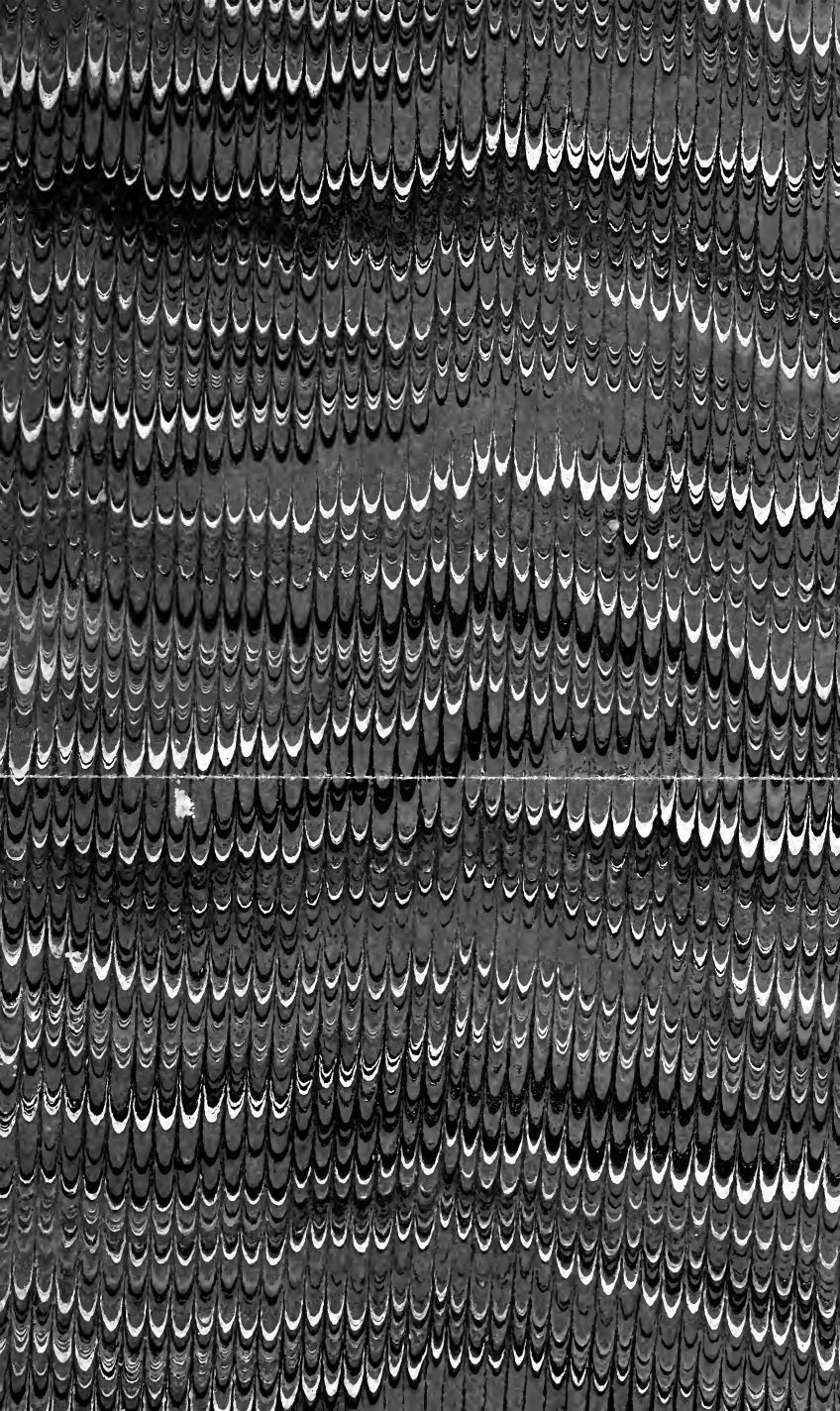
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THE AGE OF TINSEL.



J. E. Donoho.
✓
THE AGE OF TINSEL:

1843?
Donoho.
A SATIRE.

By J. E. Tuel.
711

"An incongruous mixture up of thought."

"You know, or don't know, that great Bacon saith—
'Fling up a straw, 'twill show the way the wind blows;'
And such a straw, borne on by human breath,
Is poesy, according as the mind glows;
A paper kite which flies 'twixt life and death,
A shadow which the onward soul behind throws.
And mine's a bubble not blown up for praise,
But just to play with, as an infant plays."

Byron.

NEW-YORK:
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR

BY
SAMUEL COLMAN.

1843.



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John Douglas, Printer, 71 Gold St.

THE AGE OF TINSEL.

I.

OH! for the genius of a lawless Byron,
To revel wildly in disjointed verse—
To do full justice to the scene I look on
Now with my mind's eye : to describe it terse,—
To paint its colours in their mingling—t' form
It in one bold picture of description ; fierce
And mild in style, just as the subject borne
On fancy's wings would grave or gaily turn.

II.

The theme of satire is not yet exhausted—

Never will be, so long as men, and women,
Too, in their respective fields, their boasted
Charms and vaunted powers display ; and when
One poet by folly's reign is hoisted
Into satire's throne, and resigns,—again,
Another in due time assumes the seat,
And to his subjects their due deserts mete.

III.

But some may say that I am an usurper,

And have to what I claim no valid right ;
That I am to this throne but a pretender—
Can show no title which will please the sight
Of subjects, who are readers ; and to fight
My way would be but to surrender
All my claims to their esteem. I'll therefore see
What I can do by acting modestly.

IV.

Were I a poet born for this high chair,
Wherefore my title would be genius, wit,
A knowledge deep of men, of books as rare,
Which would me for its vacancy befit,
I fear I'd be a tyrant, or my laws would bear
No bending—which would lead some to forget
My mercy in my justice; and to others I
Would yield the praise which envy passes by.

V.

I'd have no courtiers—therefore no minions
Around my throne to seek unworthy rank;
No breath of mine should make them easy pinions
To fly into the public sky, and prank
In all the littleness of great pretensions.
Nor would I keep my honest power blank,
To be fill'd up by fawning middling scribes,
Who purchase fulsome praise for nameless bribes.

VI.

Although king of letters, my laws should be
Republican ; a fixed equality
Of these should rule the learned realm ; and he
Who would expect to find immunity
From them, would in himself example see
The concord of impartiality,
Which would bestow, in one harmonious strain,
The praise or censure which deserved the same.

VII.

But I find me wandering from the theme
I first set out with—my object is to pen
A light description of a varied scene
Of women fair and literary men ;
All mingling in one splendid show. I mean
To be their faithful showman ; and when
They place themselves before us in this light,
We'll both their virtues and their vices cite.

VIII.

I see before my mind a group assembling,
The rich in beauty and the great in name!
Some their homage paying—others making
Their obeisance to respect; the ardent strain
Of music's voice chimes in, sweetly blending
Its notes with milder ones; a living vein
Of deep hid joy is midst the circle breaking,
And through its stream of life in beauty gushing.

IX.

Poets of every grade are mingled here—
Of orators the mixture is as great;
Novelists, whose claims are middling fair,
And authors who have met an early fate
In their career of brilliancy; others rare
In their inventive genius, and some who sate
In judgment upon these, are also here,
With other men whose deeds ne'er reach'd my ear.

X.

But first of all, who is he in the corner,
Who looks so placid and serene of eye ?
Who hath an air of melancholy stupor,
And seems to gaze on nought but vacancy ?
It is, in truth, no one but Mr. Dreamer,
As usual, absorbed in revery.
But "many are poets (sure) who never pen,"
And I've no doubt but he is one of them.

XI.

And there is MR. BALLAD, who has some
Reputation for his tame effusions,
Alternately in prose and verse, upon
Love and beauty, and the "starry heavens ;"
All which he writes to kill. He hath won
Many smiles from flattered lips ; his writings,
When I last perused—or rather saw them, had
The modest title of G. Philelphus Ballad.

XII.

But let us, "gentle reader," mark the coming
Up of MR. ALBERT FOREIGN, who has been
Recently abroad. He is advancing
Towards a group of *attachés* ; and doth seem
To be bound up in ecstasies at having
An opportunity to thinly screen
His vulgar tongue beneath their foreign cloak
Of native language which he badly spoke.

XIII.

Nevertheless, he always doth avail
Himself of such occasions to relate
Whate'er he has to, in't ; and if he fail
To speak it right—if the unhappy fate
Of the poor language be compelled to snail
Itself along the bungled tongue, its gait
(As in his case) stopped by an intruding word
Of English sound—is not th' effect absurd ?

XIV.

As in the case of Mr. Such-a-one—

(A name somewhat more common than the
Browns,)

When he attempts to ask in French a question,

He mixes up French verbs with English nouns,
And in hunting for the meaning, often

The Frenchman is perplexed to find its bounds ;
Which as often makes him to reply *Je vous*
Comprends, Monsieur, to what he never knew.

XV.

To kill a living language is a sin,

To mangle up a dead one is as bad ;

But some delight to show their prowess in

This kind of slaughter. If I my way had
With these self-same hackers, who deem they win
A learned reputation by their sad
Treatment to such an unprotected thing,
I'd make their punishment the worst of strangling.

XVI.

But wherefore do I wander from my theme,
 Into a dissertation of this kind ?
I doubtless very impolite have been
 In leaving Mr. Foreign thus behind :
But I have just set out, as Sterne said, in
 My travelling ; and I hope to find
Much better manners ere I leave this strain—
So, therefore, Mr. Foreign, come again.

XVII.

I left him to a foreign group advancing,
 With whom he doubtless was much entertained,
And round the brilliant circle was surveying
 What it congenial to his taste contained.
And then anon familiarly was calling
 O'er lords and ladies, all which he named
As flippantly as if he never had been
Within the presence of a vulgar plebeian.

XVIII.

His conversation is all diplomatique,

Whene'er he deigns to talk *at all* of home ;
And then it is exceedingly erratic,

And ne'er confined to what the subject's on
Of home affairs—he's a better critique

In all foreign things and nations, and shone
Tenfold more brilliantly in a conversation
Whene'er the subject was a foreign nation.

XIX.

Of literature, he knows a little—

That is, of foreign ; and whate'er of native
He deems insipid, and to entitle

It a moment's rank above creative
Things of half-way excellence, is to settle

A thing that is entirely decisive
With English potentates in literature,
Who rule the realm of letters as of war.

XX.

Our country, it is true, is young as yet
In Arts and Science, and in Poetry;
We have not grown to such a sudden height
Of literary splendour, as to vie
With other nations, who are shedding light
That hath been burning in full brilliancy
For centuries, and yet remains to shine
To blaze their glory throughout endless time.

XXI.

Our brief history does not yet present
A list of countless names of genius splendid.
Some there are, 'tis true, whose pens have lent
Their country honor, which hath well repaid
Them in some few instances: as when it sent
To Spain's dominion, one of noble grade
In literature, who's foremost in our mind's advance
In graceful diction, beauty, and romance.

XXII.

But there has suddenly a splendor gone*

From out our mind's circle : our constellation
Of few stars have been bereft of one

Whose brilliancy was not confined to nation
In its light. It pierced all earth—it shone

In all the light of mind ; the first station
In reason's world was it's ; and though fled its day,
The light it shed will never pass away.

XXIII.

Through error's labyrinth its rays will lead

The road to truth : or a beacon on the shore
Of the mind's dark sea, to for ever shed

A deep flood of light upon it—to pour
It in one sure channel, that those who tread

Its doubtful surface may be safely o'er
Its billows borne. His spirit, gone to heaven,
Hath to the world its pure example given.

* Dr. Channing.

XXIV.

In bold description of wild Indian life,
And the forest and the mountain, and the
Warriors of these red men—their bloody strife
Of war and love—and of the glorious sea,
One excels, who late hath made a knife

One would think to cut up by the roots his tree
Of fame, at which he has been deeply cutting
With fearless fury without once abating.

XXV.

I wonder some men will so far forget
The duty which they owe themselves and the
Public—those who have attained deserved respect
For talents rare or virtues—as to be
Eternally at war with those who'll not permit

Them to enjoy their honours quietly :
For envy will be envy—why, then, let
Our minds become by its vile ends upset.

XXVI.

Let it wax faint with rage : to battle it
Is but to add a fearful implement
To its destructive means. Let it spit
Its venom, till its dying breath hath sent
Its last faint effort ; thus when its jealous fit
Hath gone off of itself,—when it hath spent
Its violence in useless fury, doubtless
Our virtues will be deemed entirely stormless.

XXVII.

There are some rogues of character, who steal
The honor of existence, like rogues of lesser crime,
Without knowing its true value. They feel
Its want, although they never knew it. The time
They spent in villainy, hath been a peal
Of trumpet-tongue damnation ; and its chime
With others' praise, is to their jealous ears
A source of pain which costs them endless tears.

XXVIII.

These are the smaller pilferers of society's
Best treasure : there are some tenfold larger,
And like all great rogues, among varieties
They stand the first in point of character,
To the lesser. They steal to make disparities
In others' wealth of honesty and virtue :
So with what of these they take in secret stealth
From others' store, may add to their own wealth.

XXIX.

But enough of this : let's have a specimen
Of poets—I give but specimens in this
My computation of those who pen ;
And if in hurry or in haste I miss
To give a passing glance at some great man,
Who stand full high in literary bliss,
It is not from a wish to do injustice—
The lines I wrote above will clearly prove this.

XXX.

Nor is the order in which I place my
Opinion of others, a criterion
Of their respective merits, even by
My own mind's standard, by which I form
A verdict of their cases in this my
Literary court. I take them from
My memory's docket, just as I them find—
The first is tried whose case is first in mind.

XXXI.

Chaste diction and pure thought hath found in one
Among us, if not more, a worshipper,
With enough of fancy and imagination
To breathe a soul-enchancing pray'r
To Apollo's altar. A creation
Of brighter gems ne'er sparkled, nor the ear
Ne'er heard sweeter music than is warbled in
The bright flowing numbers of The Fountain.

XXXII.

But this is not his fame, for Liberty
Finds a new lineage of her birthright
In his pure symbol of her sanctity,
And Thanatopsis pictures many bright
And glowing images. But I will not cite
More of his beauties ; and the rarity
Of his little faults are not worth citing,
I'll therefore leave them, to his taste submitting.

XXXIII.

Some one has said, though I think with error,
That Campbell's ode on Hohenlinden
Almost repaid for the bloody slaughter
Of that glorious fight ; but surely pen,
As intimated, ne'er wrote a sentence faultier.
But it may be said with truth, the ode that's written
Upon Bozzaris' death (with all his martial fame),
Will add as much to his undying name.

XXXIV.

And many other things, of equal merit,
Have issued from the same familiar pen :
It hath infused its light and gentle spirit
In Fanny's Poem—"what's in a name"—when
A thing breathing wit and beauty in it,
Bears such an unpretending title, blending
All these sweetly. But I have known some
Other Fannys (out of books) as handsome.

XXXV.

Who sails along my mind now ? The Buccaneer.
He ploughs the sea of verse in curbless style ;
He flings the spray about him without the fear
Of losing his sure rudder ; awhile
Lofty waves in passion's sea, in grandeur
Rise above him, and anon a smile
Of light gleams o'er his prow, intermingling
Its milder hues with fiercer strokes of lightning.

XXXVI.

A bold and vivid picture of dark life
Is here pourtrayed—the heart its canvas ;
Painting the pangs of conscience in its strife
With dismal thoughts of blood, that trespass
Themselves upon the wicked mind, that cut's a knife
Heated in molten fire, whose edges pass
In fiery torture o'er the guilty heart,
Cutting its hardened strings in flames apart.

XXXVII.

Notes of wild music flow in melody
From the VOICES OF THE NIGHT. But I must cease
This elaboration : it is a duty
I find too irksome to my mind, whose peace
May be somewhat disturbed by lengthy
Criticisms. I will therefore release
It from its burthen, and speak at random
Of other authors which my eye may light on.

XXXVIII.

I cannot linger long at Arnold's grave,

Where oft I've shed some tears, nor stop to sport
With merry children at their play—I gave
Some hours to these before ; and the short
Time I have to ramble o'er this field, will leave
Me not a moment to glance at the forte
Of many other sterling things of his—
I mean, of course, the things of N. P. W****s.

XXXIX.

Nor can I wander in the sonnet PARK,

Where oft I've wiled away an hour of pleasure ;
That is the fullest flower in that walk,
Though there are others equally of treasure.
I might some of them in this ramble mark,
But, as I said before, I have not leisure ;
I'll therefore cull but one, and that will be
“ Enough that thou art cold, and I am free.”

XL.

Nor can I bend me but a moment o'er
The grave of her whose death the son laments :
I've shed with him, in filial love, a tear,
For which, alas ! nor sigh nor tear prevents.
A monument of nobler kind was ne'er
Erected o'er a loved one, which cements
Stronger in death the living love. Would that my
Unliving notes could breathe such melody.*

XLI.

Nor shall the notes that issue from the lyre
Of sweet AMELIA lure me from my task.
I cannot offer to the kindling fire
Of her bright genius but one spark of praise. To bask
In SIGOURNEY's splendor I would aspire.
But such a priceless boon I cannot ask.
The Hemans of the country some do deem her,
But—I have no decision in the matter.

* G. D. Prentice.

XLII.

Nor shall the notes of MORRIS—I 'll not stay
My pen to listen to his swelling lyre ;
I have a love for it, as well I may,
Revere the tones which melt the heart to fire.
I might be urged by some, 'tis true, to lay
It aside, as unworthy to admire ;
But what I write is but my own opinion,
Entirely free from other folks' dominion.

XLIII.

Who would extend the empire of their thought
To every other mind—who would not, if they
could,
Allow another man's to be considered aught
Until their own tyrannic compact should
Be observed—who would enslave, in short,
All freedom of opinion, and who would
Wield their sceptre with despotic sway,
O'er all who dared their mandates disobey.

XLIV.

Nor can I wander with Ahasuerus
Throughout his last perambulation ;
Although I have no doubt his journey is
As pleasant in this democratic nation,
As any he has traversed o'er. Exception
Certainly cannot be taken to his
Present princely leader, who has given us
An evidence of high poetic genius.

XLV.

Nor can I wander forth with HOWARD PINCKNEY,
Nor CLINTON BRADSHAW, in their adventures.
I doubtless would derive from both a plenty
Of light amusement, and would find some censures
Upon some things ; the author has variety
In his pages, and but rarely ventures
Aught but what he does with great precision—
He hath, I ween, for character a vision.

XLVI.

But ere I leave this theme, let me recall*

To sadden'd recollection one whose name
Should be deep cherish'd in the breast of all
Who feel the warmth of the all-hallowed flame
Of genius glowing in them—the pall
Of death too soon o'ercast him : his early fame
As breathed in notes of mournful song, will be
Remembered for their touching melody.

XLVII.

Too soon he followed her whose early doom
Shed o'er his after days a funeral pall !
The only sound of joy that reach'd the tomb
Of his sad feelings, where was buried all
His happiness on earth—which dispelled its gloom,
Broke from the swellings of his lyre, that fall
In mingled harmony upon the ear,
Like sounds of sadden'd music from afar.

* The lamented Willis Gaylord Clark.

XLVIII.

* * * * *

* * * * *

XLIX.

Let's for a moment glance at Fashion's queen,
 Who now in triumph trails before my sight;
 We've had enough of literature, I ween,
 As much, at least, as I'm disposed to write.
 You doubtless oft her retinue have seen
 Of handmaids, ministers, courtiers, and the like,
 All which doth bend in homage to her throne—
 The greatest despot which the world hath known.

L.

Every city has its queen of fashion—

I'll not say king, because that title is
Not so expressive of its dominion ;

Besides, a woman very often is
Selected for the very personation

Of tyranny ; and when her nature is
Converted from its mild and placid state,
'Tis said man's passions are not half so great.

LI.

She has her handmaids, as I said before—

She has, also, her ministers of state ;
She has her courtiers, and she has her more

Than fawning sycophants ; the galling weight
Of social chains she throws in terror o'er

Her slaves, are heavier than a serf's—his are light
In his unconsciousness of aught but thralldom,
But they wear chains, and yet aspire to freedom.

LII.

She has her ministers, who enact her laws,
Of silly customs and fantastic tricks,
Who well assert these trappings of her cause
In their own persons. Her courtier sticks
The most devoutly to them—but let me pause,
Else I may with some wrath my feelings mix
In this description. I will rest me, then,
Ere I release this vermin from my pen.

LIII.

He's generally nought professional,
(Or if he is, 'tis only as profess'd ;)
His calling is a little questionable,
Or stands but very narrowly confess'd.
He is a stickler for all that's fashionable
In manners, customs, and conceives him blessed
If once he can, by dint of hard exertion,
Beplace him by the side of wealth or station.

LIV.

His conversation is confined entirely

To men and women who are of the *ton* :

He never deigns to speak but very slightly

To any but of that *familiar* throng ;

And when he walks the street or ball-room nimbly,

You 'll surely find him arm in arm along

With some one who will meet this last description.

—This is the tree this butterfly doth light on.

LV.

I do not like to speak of fashion's train—

I mean her train of handmaids—my gallant pen
Would be, I fear, subjected to some pain,

Were I to speak as unreserved of them
As I have of their partners. Besides, the pain

I meant to give some of her mawkish men,
Would, if transferred to their more gentle sex,
(I'll not say weaker,) a bad feeling vex.

LVI.

Therefore, adieu to them—and adieu to

All of “fashion’s fools”—but ere I leave this scene

Let me attempt to mark the forte of who

I now behold approaching me—I mean

An orator—one somewhat famous, too ;

Whose fame, at least, is balancing between

That doubtful point, when some are loudly praising,

And when some others are as loud denouncing.

LVII.

That same time when there is some small proof

Of merit in us—else why this bustle

About our character, and all, forsooth ?

It is, indeed, a strange and foolish tussle

That’s carried on about us, when, in truth,

We are not worth it ! Why, then, this jostle

Between our friends and foes ? why this fuss ?

It must, indeed, be caused by something in us.

LVIII.

I've heard him speak upon some light occasion,
When debate had nigh assumed a dull
And languid air ; and then I've heard him in oration
When there did stillness reign throughout the full,
Deep auditory, which his mild persuasion
Asserted o'er it. And then I've known him lull
The fiercest sea of passion into rest,
Such was the power his eloquence possess'd.

LIX.

'T was the voice of reason, thro' impressive
Words—no extravagance of rhetoric dress
Deform'd its natural beauty, in expletive
Tropes and figures carried to excess.
Nor was it dull and unimaginative,
But of that kind when thoughts that burn doth
press
Themselves upon the mind, and there remain
Until the kindling lips receive the flame.

LX.

Here must end my theme—or so much of it

As I'm disposed to write about to-night ;

But e'er I take a final leave of it,

Let me premise a word or so at sight :

The age of Gold has gone—Bronze follow'd it,

Which was a shade below the other's light ;

This may be called the age of Brass, or Tinsel,

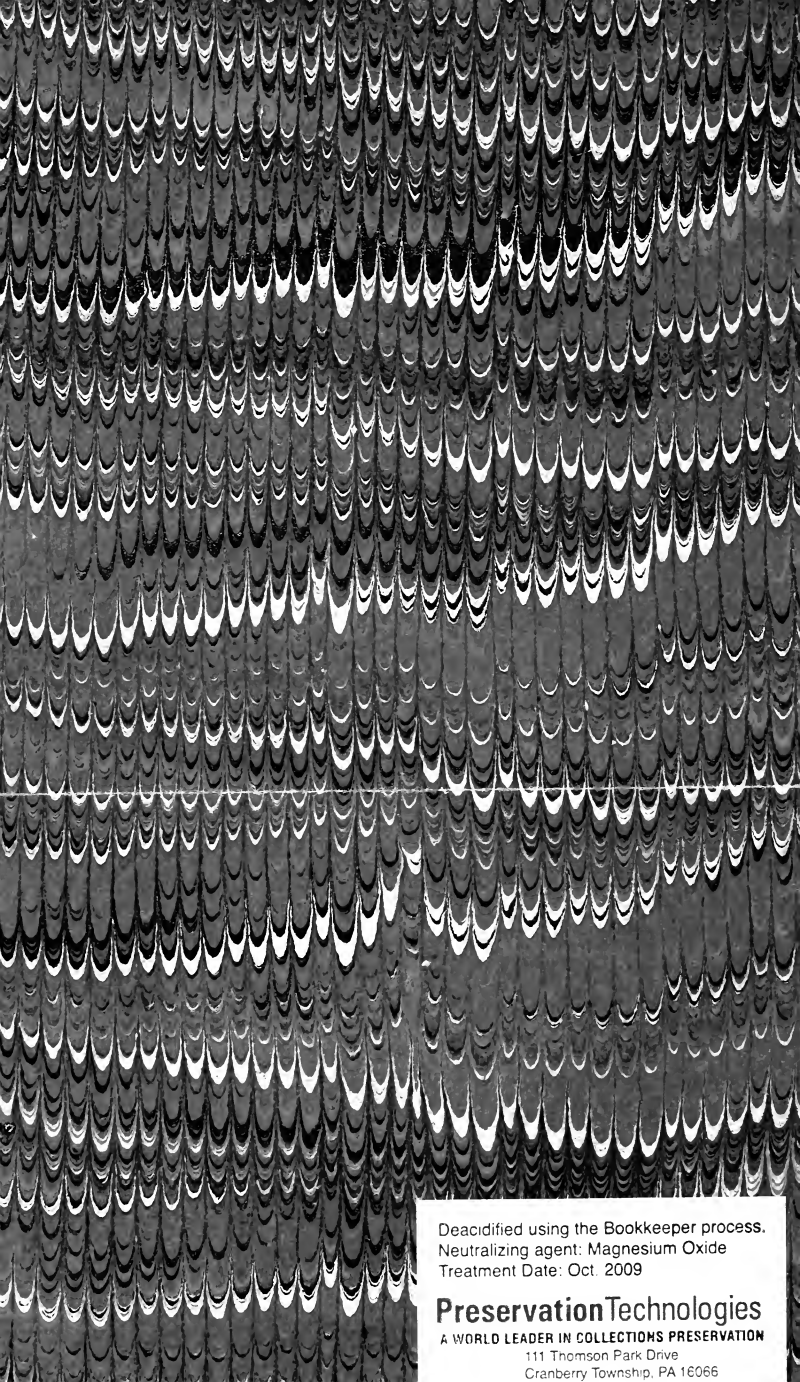
Either of which will suit its nature well.

THE END.





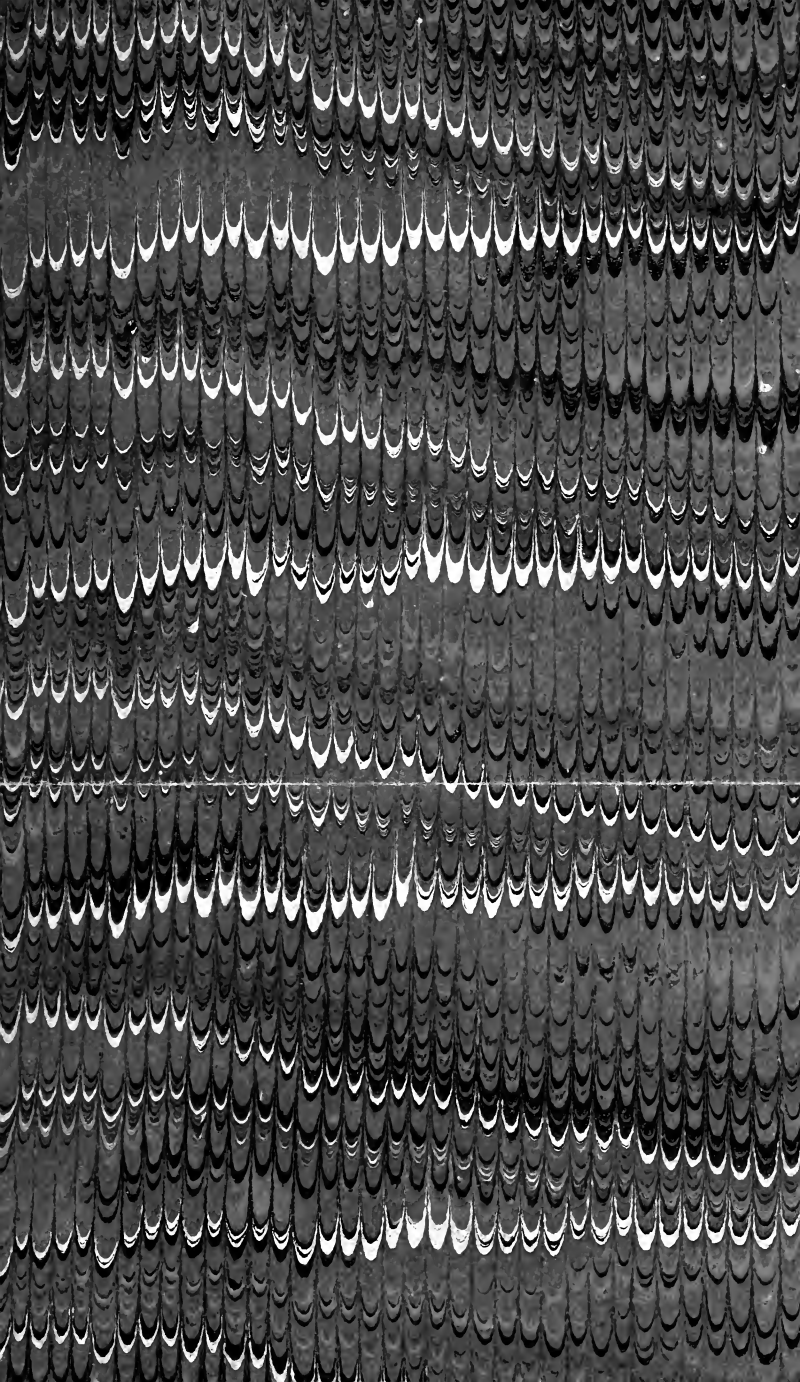




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